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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 000527

SIPDIS

FOR WHA/CEN, WHA/PPC, DRL/PHD, INL/LP

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV KCRM ASEC SNAR KJUS PREL HO

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT MADURO VOWS TO COMBAT RISING MINOR
HOMICIDE RATE

REF: 02 TEGUCIGALPA 2956

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Roger D. Pierce for reasons
1.5(b) and (d).

1. (U) On February 19, before a hastily convened international audience which included the ambassadors of Great Britain, Taiwan, Germany, France, Spain, as well as PolOff, President Ricardo Maduro vowed to combat Honduras' surging homicide rate for minors. Maduro expressed his administration's deep concern about the issue, calling the murder of children the "ultimate human rights violation," and asserted that those perpetuating these crimes will be brought to justice. At the same time, however, Maduro acknowledged the lack of law enforcement resources as a serious impediment, specifically mentioning that every homicide investigator is responsible for over 200 cases. The President was accompanied by Defense Minister Frederico Breve and the Minister of Public Security Oscar Alvarez.

2. (U) Following Maduro's remarks Public Security Minister Alvarez presented government statistics compiled by his office outlining the scope of the problem. Between 1998 and 2002, the GOH's figures count 744 minors murdered in Honduras, primarily in the major urban centers of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula. This figure is substantially higher than the 574 cited by the Minister of Government and Justice in an October 2002 report (reftel). Casa Alianza (a child advocacy NGO) has estimated that there were 1,500 extrajudicial killings of youth under age 23 (including minors) between January 1998 and December 2002. Alarming, during 2002 homicides of minors accounted for 42 percent of all cases. Alvarez believes increased gang activity is to blame for the killings. This has become a particular concern since the U.S. government has stepped up deportations of Honduran nationals, many of whom were hardened gang members while in the United States.

3. (SBU) During his remarks, Alvarez failed to address accusations of extrajudicial killings by GOH security forces. Alvarez only restated often-repeated GOH policy that Honduras would not tolerate, condone, or excuse the murder of children. In a government handout titled "Special Report on Child Homicide," (distributed after the event) the issue was broached, but then only to discount the possibility that security forces have played any major role in child homicide.

3. (C) COMMENT: The homicide closure rate in Honduras is between 1-2 percent compared to a national U.S. closure rate of close to 70 percent. While the GOH has adequately identified the murder of minors as a serious issue, its inability to dedicate more resources and technical ability to address the problem underscores the GOH's lack of follow-through on commitments made to the international community last fall (reftel). The failure to recognize the role of security forces in these killings and/or to report on the status of the over 20 cases where police are accused of involvement, signals that the GOH is not seriously addressing the possibility that its own security forces may be implicated and if so, to what degree. END COMMENT

Palmer